

William
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Luebo, Congo Belge, Africa,
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My dear Friends:-

I have just completed that experience without which no one's impressions of the Congo are at all complete--a trip "on the path". I left Luebo several weeks ago for Mutoto, a distance of 120 miles and a trip of six days, rather a slow rate but the hot sun cuts down the hours when we can actually travel. We discarded the usual mode of Congo travel, that is, a hammock carried on the shoulders of natives, for the more modern bicycle, although carrying a hammock for emergencies. The bicycle is an ideal vehicle for this section of the Congo.

Two other missionaries and I left Luebo with quite a cavalcade carrying our boxes; practically everything that will be needed on the trip has to be carried, as little can be found on the way. The endurance of the natives carrying their loads is wonderful and they swing along at a trot for endless miles, chanting their weird marching song, and stopping only for a quick plunge into the many streams that our trail crosses.

A day on the road begins early. By four-thirty, well before day-light, we are stirring and in the early morning mist we dress, attend a prayer service with the men, have breakfast and often before the sun appears are mounting our bicycles for the most wonderful part of our day's run--the hours in the cool of the morning. The trail is varied. Perhaps it leads into the wonder of a tropical forest, winding through a green-walled tunnel, over a path worn smooth by hundreds of brown-soled feet. Reaching far above the luxuriance of the tropical growth running riot on every side the trees rear their slender trunks to support a leafy canopy; through it there filters a light--green and cool--like that in some fairy cavern by the sea. There is a freshness in the air strange to these tropical regions. A faint breeze brings the sweetness of some over-head vine, hung with star-like flowers, and an invisible choir of songsters, sometimes betrayed by a flash of gold or scarlet, carol madly above our heads. Forgotten now are the burning days, the long nights of loneliness, the ignorance, sickness and superstition that seem the heritage of this land and for the time one feels and thinks of only the glory and the beauty of the forest dawn. Then the trail changes. We are out of the forest now and bowling over a plain where the sun is beginning to be felt. On either side of the sandy path grasses, eight, ten and twelve feet high, can be seen, almost over--topping the scrub trees that are scattered here and there. Soon we are apt to encounter a long slope down which we fly, coasting, and stop only where the slope ends in the inevitable ravine, sometimes several hundred feet deep; down we scramble, crossing the rude, native-built bridge at the bottom and toil up the opposite bank, grateful for the roots and branches of the trees by which we pull up.

Only short distances can be traveled without encountering a native village of from ten to a hundred houses. As if learning by instinct of our coming, troops of little boys meet us on the

outskirts of the village and follow us in, shouting and calling their "Muoyo, Mukelenge" ("Life to you, O Chief"), as they run behind us. In the village a stop is made to speak to the chief and our native evangelist. If time permits a service is held but we do not have the time to do the work accomplished on a regular evangelistic tour. Mounting, we are off again, pursued by a noisy, happy crowd of half the village who follow us for a long distance before they return.

By ten o'clock we are ready to stop for the morning and to rest in the village where we will eat our lunch. Generally our first inquiry is if there are any pineapples to be had! I doubt if there is any fruit ever eaten that is as refreshing as a big African pineapple when one has toiled for several hours along a sun-broiled stretch of plain. We are welcomed by the chief and our evangelist. The stop is generally made at the house of the evangelist, always the neatest in the village. Through his influence the evangelist is almost as important as the chief. Most of the village soon congregates in a circle around us, the crowd increasing every minute until often we have to push them back to get a breath of air! The white man and everything about him are never-ending sources of amazement to them. A large part of the throng is composed of heathen women, as yet unreached, who stand giggling, scantily clad and half-shamed but curious around us. What an encouraging contrast to them and what a commentary on the work already accomplished in the way that the evangelist's wife, neatly dressed, will come forward to greet us, followed generally by several other young women who show the effects of her training. Here, among just such throngs as this, living in just such small villages must our work eventually succeed or fail. Through just such unconscious heroes as this evangelist and his wife, standing true to their faith in the midst of the superstition and heathenism surrounding them, must the Word be spread. We are obliged to have our large centers for training but our real problem will be solved only to the extent that we reach the native in his village.

A short run in the late afternoon brings us to the village where we are to spend the night. The chief places at our disposal several mud houses, the best that the village affords, and with our cots up, a mat on the floor and camp stools around, it is remarkable how comfortable the quarters can be made. Supper is soon cooking and is generally served in the open. Afterwards, for a short while, we sit around under the star-light--the African star-light that never loses its wonder or its charm---great flashing stars of green and gold and blue such as are never seen save where the Southern Cross is hung, here and there the small native camp fires flicker and flare up against the darkness, and in our ears, from some forest village, the never-ceasing boom of an African drum. It is the close of a day on the path, and of such days is the "spell of Africa" woven.

Faithfully yours,

Frank J. Gilliam.

Nashville, Tennessee, July, 1922.

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Town.. Letters 5¢; postcards 2¢.